

FEBRUARY, 1998

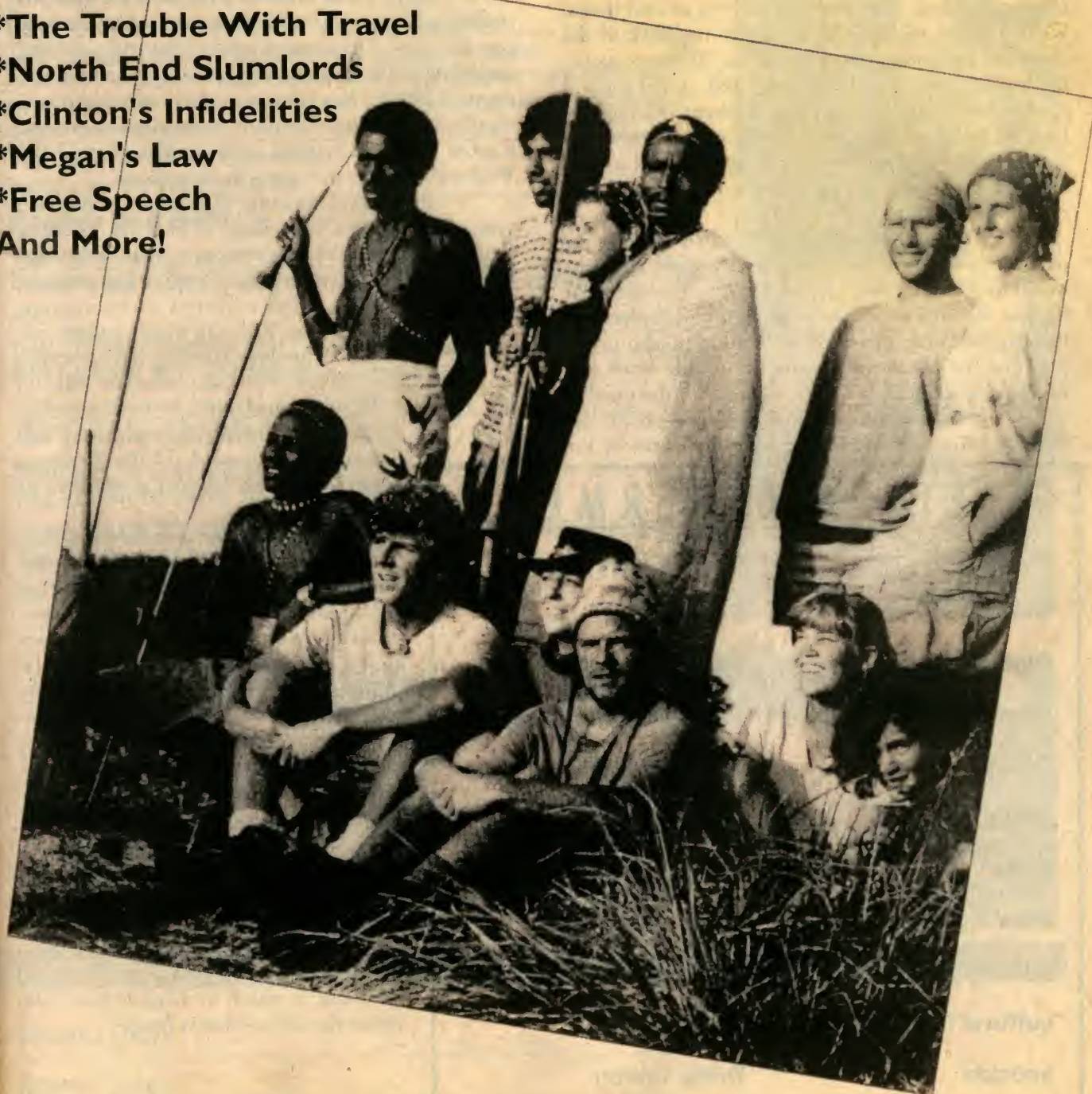


HERMES

WESLEYAN'S MAGAZINE OF POLITICAL, CRITICAL, AND CREATIVE THOUGHT

INSIDE:

- *The Trouble With Travel
- *North End Slumlords
- *Clinton's Infidelities
- *Megan's Law
- *Free Speech
- And More!



CAMPUS DIARY

Of Chairs and Purchasing Policies

I'm somewhere around 5'11"—an above average height, to be sure, but hardly an unusual one for an American adult. Yet whoever manufactured and purchased many of the chair/desks in Wesleyan's classrooms (I'm thinking particularly of most of Fisk and of several rooms in the Science Center—PAC is mostly ok) seems not to have considered that a person of my prodigious size would have to sit at said desks. When I sit up with my back against the back of the chair and my knees bent at roughly a 90-degree angle, my legs hit the desk. This is, mind you, in flat shoes. I sure as hell can't cross my legs without twisting my body so that I quickly develop back pain. To write on a notebook sitting on the desk, I have to curl over—more back pain. Slouching is not a viable option, for reasons I don't quite understand.

While I'm sure that the child-sized desks we now have were cheaper than adult-sized versions would have been, I don't especially care. I assume that I'm not the only person to be made uncomfortable by these hellish little pieces of furniture. I'm also pretty sure that the people responsible for having made and bought them don't have to sit at them for the number of hours per week that students do. Here's my feeling, then: as an equalizing measure, all members of the

administration, particularly the purchasing department, should have to work at these desks for one full work week. Once that's been done, the University should institute a policy that requires the person in charge of deciding what brand of desk to buy to spend several hours in each of the options before finalizing the purchase.

-Laura Clawson

Why Hermes?

Hermes was founded in 1975 by a group of student activists upset with Wesleyan's school newspaper, the *Argus*. *Hermes* is named after the god who, according to Greek mythology, slew the hundred-eyed monster, *Argus*. Nowadays we see ourselves more as a supplement than an alternative to the *Argus*, providing a more political, critical, and analytical outlet for Wesleyan students to express their opinions.

About seven issues of *Hermes* are produced a year. We publish a wide range of material, including articles on campus life, photo essays, short fiction, and opinion pieces, but we tend to focus on activism and social commentary from a variety of viewpoints. *Hermes* serves as an open forum in which students can publish their ideas, stimulate activism and awareness on campus, and maybe even make someone laugh in the process. We are always open to controversy or criticism, and we just love articles which report the dirty deeds of the Wesleyan administration, a form of activism in its own right.

The staff of *Hermes* meets once a week, usually on Sundays at 4pm in the WSA building (190 High St.). We are organized as a nonhierarchical collective, and work in an informal manner. *Hermes* has no permanent positions and nobody is in charge; decisions are made by the entire staff. Newcomers are welcome to show up and get involved at any time. In addition to staff writers, we need people willing to do proof-reading, editing, photography, and layout. We are presently using Adobe Photoshop and Quark Xpress for the Macintosh; if you are familiar with either (or would like to learn really quick), there is always work to be done. *Hermes* is what you make of it; the quality of output relies entirely on student input. With that in mind, we hope to hear from you in the not-so-distant future.

All opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the *Hermes* staff.

LET'S GO HERMES

Parthenon	Laura Clawson
Statue of Liberty	Eyal Perlson
Club Med	Ambic Mohabir
Disney Land	Brian Edwards-Tiekert
Disney World	Amanda Youngman
gringo	Livia Gershon
Coke	Li Yu
coke	Daniel Young
native	Aongus Burke
cultural imperialism	Sarah Wilkes
ecocide	Drew Tipson
authentic experience	Bob the Cat

TABLE OF CONTENTS



ARTICLES

The Last Roundup *by Jonah Horwitz*

8

The blues, the Sweet Hereafter, the Titanic, and Amistad.

The Trouble With Tourism *by Brian Edwards-Tiekert*

10

Tourism is the largest industry in the world, but it's causing more problems than it solves. Have our romantic ideals of travel and discovery put us in the position of modern-day imperialists?

Tourism Rocks *by Sarah Wilkes*

13

Tourist traps: the native's revenge.

Idealists Do It Better *by Justin Tamplin*

14

"Realistic" goals can't get us what we need.

Dragon Lord, Environment, and the Human Condition

15

by Li Yu

What a fantasy novel tells us about Enlightenment ideals.

Bill Clinton is a Scumbag *by Aongus Burke*

16

Why we should care where he put his dick.

The Trouble with Megan's Law *by Laura Clawson*

18

Notifying us where ex-offenders live does more harm than good.

The Landlord Who Wasn't *by Livia Gershon*

20

Tenants and city officials cope with Middletown's delinquent property-owners.

The Center for the Humanities

23

Don't miss one of the most interesting lecture series on campus



FEATURES • EXTRAS

Campus Diary

2

Hermes Index

4

Letters to Hermes

5

Cover design by Brian Edwards-Tiekert. Photo from St. Lawrence's Program in Kenya brochure

(With apologies to Harper's Magazine)

1. Number of staff for Tony Blair, Prime Minister of Great Britain: 30.
2. Approximate number of staff for Bill Clinton: 300
3. Percentage of dental hygienists who are women: 99
4. Percentage of auto mechanics who are women: 0.8
5. Percentage of secretaries who are women: 99
6. Percentage of women legislators worldwide: 11
7. Percentage of US senators who are women: 9
8. Percentage of Cuban legislators who are women: 22.7
9. Percentage of Iraqi legislators who are women: 10.8
10. Percentage of Kuwaiti legislators who are women: 0
11. Per capita income in Marin County CA, the richest county in the US: \$28,381
12. Percentage of white residents in Marin County: 84.6
13. Per capita income in Shannon County SD: \$3,417
14. Percentage of Sioux residents in Shannon County: 94.7
15. Per capita income in Starr County TX: \$4,152
16. Percentage of Hispanic residents in Starr County: 97.2
17. Percent growth in secret spending by CIA and NSA during the 80s: 800
18. Estimated total secret spending in 1995: \$30 billion
19. Percent of US Gross Domestic Product invested in public infrastructure (1978-1990): 0.3
20. Percent of Canadian Gross Domestic Product invested in public infrastructure (1978-1990): 1.2
21. Percent of West German Gross Domestic Product invested in public infrastructure (1978-1990): 2.1
22. Percent of Italian Gross Domestic Product invested in public infrastructure (1978-1990): 3.9
23. Percent of Japanese Gross Domestic Product invested in public infrastructure (1978-1990): 4.9
24. Annual cost of housing an inmate in a Massachusetts prison: \$29,600

Sources: 1-2: Economist Jan 30th-Feb 7th; 3-6, 8, 9: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1993; 7: Library of Congress, 1997; 11-16: 1990 US Census, Dept of Housing, Income Statistics Branch; 17-24: Challenge the Lies Campaign Organizing Guide from CCO

Letters to Hermes

.....Aongus Burke Will Make the Trains Run On Time.....

I would like to congratulate *Hermes* hero Aongus Burke on his wonderfully developed sense of self-parody, which is undoubtedly what wins him so many supporters. Aongus very deliberately adopts the tone of what a less informed reader might call a "supreme fascist bubble-boy asshole," and then exaggerates it further, allowing us all to throw back our heads and laugh along with him. That Aongus! He says the darndest things! Lines such as, "In every community there exists a permissible range of discourse," are gems of a breed long lost to those who satirize the lead-licking left. They are a funny bunch, indeed, and Aongus knows how much we all need a good laugh. Nothing—aside from some wonderfully underappreciated porn on the Table of Contents—can better fill that void inside the Wesleyan student. Aongus isn't just some ego-trippin' loudmouth with nothing new to

say and even less of an ability to do so with any remote sense of respect or diplomacy; no, his every word envelopes the love and the understanding necessary for us to grow together, to eschew the precarious fate of the spoiled student who mistakes an expensive bubble for a "distinct intellectual culture." And the title! "Free Speech My Ass." Can you beat it? Aongus Burke is clearly not out to be controversial for the sake of being remarkably uninteresting and unproductive. He is an essential part of this great community of humor at Wesleyan, and I encourage him to never ever let us lapse into serious debate on the important topics. It would only disturb the delicate balance that's costing my dad a whole hell of a lot of money.

—Tim Howard

.....An Open Letter to Aongus Burke and the Wesleyan Community.....

I am writing today in response to Aongus Burke's "Campus Diary" in the December 1997 issue of the *Hermes*. In that issue, Mr. Burke prescribes what he views as the acceptable range of political discourse for the Wesleyan Community. Notably, his charge to Wesleyan students calls for the exclusion of "right-wing discourse" from the campus (his exact words are, "The more that left-thinking people acquiesce to the intrusion of right-wing discourse on to this campus, the more we contribute to the disintegration of the distinct intellectual culture that currently exists at Wesleyan.")

I would like to contradict Mr. Burke's less-than-liberal critique of campus political sentiment with my own critique of his politics. While Mr. Burke would

"While Mr. Burke would surely like Wesleyan students to believe that his rhetoric stands for liberalism and social activism, it is the opposite that is true. In fact, his characterization of 'right-wing' sentiment on campus is truly conservative, elitist and xenophobic."

surely like Wesleyan students to believe that his rhetoric stands for liberalism and social activism, it is the opposite that is true. In fact, his characterization of "right-wing" sentiment on campus is truly conserv-



ative, elitist and xenophobic.

It is true that many consider Wesleyan to be a safe haven for discourses that have been marginalized in mainstream American culture. However, Mr. Burke ignores the reason that this is so, namely, that Wesleyan is attractive to people of all political flavors because it embraces the virtues of liberal education. Perhaps he has confused the idea of liberal education, that process of multi-disciplinary critical inquiry, with the idea of "liberal" American politics, often concerned with opposition to the Republican Party. In any case, to irrationally attack differing ideology is not to engage in the spirit of critical analysis, but to defend the status quo per se.

My second point, that Mr. Burke's argument is elitist, rests on the fact that he defends "the distinct intellectual culture that currently exists at Wesleyan" as the only culture worth preserving. I add here that once again, Mr. Burke has confused the idea of an intellectual culture with a political culture. In this light, it would seem that Mr. Burke is interested in only one kind of political discourse, invalidating all others (encompassing those of a more conservative nature as well as those of a more liberal, progressive and even radical nature than his own).

Finally, I wish to point out that Mr. Burke is guilty of using the same logic to marginalize conservative political sentiment here at Wesleyan as has been used by others to marginalize liberal political sentiment in mainstream American culture. He reinforces the idea that only certain kinds of discourses are acceptable in certain places. While I agree that all thought and expression deserves to be recognized, I do not agree that we should go about dictating the place, time or medium for such expression. To do so is simply censorship, no less. It is akin to the music industry deciding who gets to listen to (and record) what music; it is akin to the television and movie industries deciding what content is appropriate for what viewer;

I don't want Republicans to feel welcome because I don't want to waste my time debating a body of thought that is so obviously dedicated to preserving the privileges of rich, white, heterosexual men.

and it is akin to "neighborhood associations" deciding what people of which race may live in their neighborhoods.

I could go on, but my point is obvious: to exclude an outside group based on the fear that they may upset the status quo is unfair. When such discrimination is practiced by formerly marginalized groups it is paradoxical to the point of being ludicrous. When one group intimidates another into foregoing self-expression it is censorship. And when we stand for this kind of exclusionary, discriminatory and anti-democratic

rhetoric at Wesleyan, we will have lost the power of every step and every stride we have made against the sea of intolerance we confront every day.

Sincerely,
Zachary K. Becker '99

Aongus Responds

You know, I was hoping the last Hermes issue would stir up some controversy and get people talking. The panel discussion on fluid sexuality was organized with that in mind. If that didn't work, I figured, hey, why not throw in a picture of two naked guys about to buttfuck with my article on that oh-so-sensitive topic about gay male promiscuity and AIDS. But, as it turns out, it's a short little piece on campus politics I wrote at the last minute that has generated all the controversy. Several close friends have labeled me a "fascist" and now I'm being called, ugh, a liberal.

Well, at least it's with the implication that I'm a bad liberal. I assure you, Zack, my argument in "Free Speech My Ass" was not a liberal one. It was in fact based on a rejection of the liberal faith in free speech.

Free speech is a myth. It does not exist anywhere, and it cannot.

Free speech is a myth. It does not exist anywhere, and it cannot. No society can persist unless just about all of its members share certain basic beliefs. Invariably, these beliefs are held with such deep conviction by so many that attempts to call them into question are treated as heresy and persecuted accordingly. If you don't believe me, I suggest you write an article in a campus publication that challenges the sanctity our society places on free speech.

OK, maybe I shouldn't play the victim card like that. I'll give you a better example. There is a group known as the North American Man Boy Love Association. In America today, people from both major parties condemn what they call child molestation routinely. It's an easy way to score political points. NAMBLA can only make its case heard in *very* select forums. Only the most radical fringes of the gay political scene will let them be heard. Personally, I reject NAMBLA's arguments because I just don't believe that anyone under, say, 14 years of age can really give informed consent when it comes to sexual matters. But I certainly do think that most of America ought to rethink the hysterical manner in which we treat any and all cases of intergenerational sexual relations. That will not happen in mainstream America for a long time. Is that free speech?

It seems like you'd like to believe that we can tran-



scend such taboos on discussing certain topics at Wesleyan, this being an "intellectual," not a "political" culture. Ask any member of the Wesleyan faculty whether they think their intellectual culture isn't intensely politicized. C'mon, I dare you.

Incidentally, nowhere in my article do I ever state that the range of discourse at Wesleyan is the only one worth preserving—though in a way I guess I do believe that's true. I certainly don't think the range of discourse at, say, Dartmouth is worth preserving. I'm, in fact, revolted by the kind of discourse that takes place there. But I can accept it so long as I have a space like Wesleyan. I don't endorse censorship in order to preserve what we do have at Wesleyan either. I wouldn't, for example, advocate that the WSA not fund the Wesleyan Republicans. If I endorse any particular tactic, it's the kind I explicitly cited in my article — making them feel unwelcome here.

I don't want Republicans to feel welcome here because I don't want to waste my time debating a body of thought that is so obviously dedicated to preserving the privileges of rich, white, heterosexual men.

As far as I'm concerned, the more time we spend debating whether the flat tax is the best method for fueling the American economy, the less time we'll spend debating whether or not capitalism is a just economic system to start with.

You, Zack, I imagine seek a broader range of discourse at Wesleyan where we can discuss both questions. I'm skeptical that that's really possible. Moreover, I doubt that it could be done in a way that isn't marginalizing to the many groups at Wesleyan that do find this place to be a safe space. How will African-American students feel when people begin to question the existence of Malcolm X house? How will queer students feel when Wespeaks start questioning their right to celebrate their sexuality openly?

Oh, wait — these things are already happening! Here's to the benefits of a broader range of discourse for everyone! A Wesleyan that's increasingly exactly the same as every other college in this wonderful country.

..... Why Staff and Students Should Quit University

Somewhere under the beautiful sky on any given day there exist places where every person can be at their best, doing what they believe to be right, creating themselves, and living up to their greatest potential.

For most of us a university is not such a place. Universities provide us with quantitatively valuable social contract but do not allow us to participate in the solutions to earth's problems. At university, we're inextricably connected to oppression as we are connected to the social and ecological problems we passively help to maintain.

We might agree that people need social contract, a healthy ecosystem, food and a warm place to sleep. For this most of us figure we need something called money (money can be exchanged for fruit, but unlike fruit it can be accumulated beyond one's needs without the visible and olfactory immorality of hoarding your own rotting pile of fruit). To get money we need a job. To get a job we need a "good" (valuable to the agenda of industrial capitalism) education. To get a good education we must go into debt. However, once in debt we become indentured labourers. A mortgage appeals to us more than rent so we go into debt again. We need a car as our lives are short on freedom and those TV commercials that we weren't really paying attention to have us associate cars and freedom. So deeper in debt we go. The debts lock in our slavery and the useless products we buy only provide us with fleeting amusement, and all around everyone seems to have chosen the same path. Is this accidental? Of course not. The banks, corporations, and the wealth lords must insure their survival through the continued strangle hold on the proletariat and the obedience and submission of the middle class.

Do we have a choice? We certainly do. Humans have been providing for themselves and their neighbors out of the bounty of the earth for millennia, before we consented to be fed by agribusinesses, clothed with synthetics, and entertained by the numbing blue flicker of network TV.

For four years I gave my money, time, and brain to a university so that I could solve math problems on a Friday night. There was little time to think beyond what CNN said about why the US military had gone to Iraq to kill people. There was no time to find out why so many products were being boycotted; no time to question pharmaceutical cures; no time to ponder the validity of science as a tool of understanding; no time for anything but competing with my brothers and sisters for the highest grades, so that I could make it to the top while they... well, who knows where they would go. For four years I bought the electricity that causes acid rain and coal miners' widows; the paper of deforestation; the chemically raised food which destroys topsoil; the products of multinational corporations who turn a blind eye to the torture and killings used to coerce labor; and the petroleum products which flood the beaches with oil and entertain us with the Gulf War. Looking back on those days, I am ashamed that I was participating in and co-operating with such a broad spectrum of evil. Now, with friends I am fighting these systems of oppression from outside the system, while far from perfect I think we have found our place and can see our potential. The radical solution to earth's problems are simple; what we need is the courage to implement our solutions.

Sincerely,

C. Derek Bower, Ganldi Farm, Nova Scotia



The Last Roundup:

by Jonah Horwitz

Music, Movies, Etc.

"Sinking of the Titanic"

Richard "Rabbit" Brown, a New Orleans songster and former vaudeville performer, recorded "Sinking of the Titanic" on March 11, 1927, along with four other songs—only one is a blues, but all are masterpieces. We don't know anything else about Brown, but his blasted, idiosyncratic interpretation of this popular broadside ballad about the shipwreck is one of the most harrowing, revealing recordings you'll ever hear.

Brown's performance drips with irony, but it's dead serious too, and moving. When he sings "the men they were left to care for themselves/but they sure played a hero's part," the inflection is sardonic. The common perception in 1927 was that the brave men of the First Cabin spared themselves to save the rag-tag women and children of the Third and Second Cabins.^[1] It was the ultimate form of noblesse oblige, and it vindicated the defenders of Gilded Age social hierarchy. Of course, the statistics belied the legend—more First Cabin men than Third Cabin children were saved—but that's how myth works: it is impervious to facts. Brown cuts through all that. His phrasing, which emphasizes "sure," allows compassion for the rich geezers, but also forces you to acknowledge that their worldliness, their dignity, was just bravado. They were mere human creatures all along.

There's more. Legend had it that there were no blacks allowed on board the Titanic. The ship—the gem of the White Star line—was supposed to be an emblem, then, of racial purity. In a time of widespread lynching in the South, motivated by the fear of miscegenation, this meant racial hatred—at least, that's how African-Americans interpreted it. There's a classic piece of African-American apocrypha that says that champion boxer Jack Johnson—a major celebrity in those days, and a rich one too—requested passage on the Titanic and was denied, because he was black. So the irony of the unsinkable ship sinking into "that great Northern sea" was compounded by the irony of Jack Johnson sitting safely at home in New York while tycoons Benjamin Guggenheim and John Jacob Astor drowned. God having his revenge on the bigots? There's no other way to explain the Titanic's profound resonance in African-American culture without accepting this interpretation of the disaster. I have Titanic songs by Texas gospel bluesman Blind Willie Johnson, Chicago street corner evangelists William and Versey Smith, Leadbelly, and many others. By the 1920's, song collectors and record men were just as likely to hear a Titanic tune as one about John Henry, or Stagger Lee.

But that's just history. You can hear it yourself. As Brown's ballad concludes, he tells us that "the music played as they went down, on that dark blue sea. And you could hear the sound of that familiar hymn, singing 'Nearer My God to Thee.'" The song collapses into the hymn itself. "Oh nearer my God to thee..." Then a guitar obbligato surges forward, and Brown, already possessed of a rough and low voice, begins to growl, his froggy false bass unsteady and alarming: "Nearrrrr-er, my *Gawwwwd*, to-oo thee / NEE-WAHHRRRRRRRRRR to THEEEEEEE."

Then the volume increases (Brown has, presumably, pulled himself closer to the microphone, dramatizing the moment when the Titanic plunged beneath the waves). The hymn continues, but it's almost unintelligible at this point; the sound carries the meaning. Brown's voice is bitter, grieving, awestruck, gleeful, authoritative, traumatized, all at once. As the hymn ends and the ballad returns for one last line, Brown returns to that nasal voice that is meant to signify reverence (he even trills an 'r,' for effect): "Darkness be o'er me / Just then the Titanic went *dowwwwn*."

I picture Brown hovering above the sinking ship, faintly visible in the night sky; delivering the verdict, and balking at its gravity. Brown is at once God and worshipper, master and slave—and how often did African-Americans get to play both roles?^[2]

The Sweet Hereafter

Atom Egoyan takes on Russell Banks's novel of the same title, and critical hosannas follow close behind. Poseur-critic Michael Wilmington^[3] of the Chicago Tribune even called it a "masterpiece." In fact, like all of Egoyan's films, *The Sweet Hereafter* is too aesthetic. The panoramic views of a snow-covered hamlet in Northern Ontario are gorgeous, as are the darkened interiors, which abound with autumnal colors and unvarnished wood. There are many stirring, beautifully-framed sequences. But such fineries cannot adequately convey the story Banks tells in his book: after nearly all of its children die when their school bus crashes into a frozen lake, a small working-class town struggles to master—or just to comprehend—its grief.

In the film, the parents' anger is humble, meditative, and almost wholly internalized. We see few expressions of public grief: Egoyan's point seems to be that trauma pulls communities apart, and that empathy is nearly impossible to come by. This is an existential premise, and it should be jarring, but it goes down easy—because all the characters are ennobled by their suffering. In Banks's novel, the closest thing to a hero,

Billy (who lost twins in the crash), ends the novel as an alcoholic and shacks up with an unworthy younger woman. The angelic, teenage Nichole, rendered paraplegic by the accident, still has a New Kids on the Block poster on the wall, and is spiteful toward her classmates. None of this turns up in the film; instead, we see Nichole singing ethereal folk-pop at the county fair and listening to the Tragically Hip. The name's too appropriate: Egoyan doesn't dare allow his heroes to be vulgar, petty, or mean-spirited.

As a corollary, the big-city lawyer who turns up in the town to try to start litigation is complex and conflicted in the novel, in which there are no outright villains. In the film, actor Ian Holm fails to suggest the complexity of motivation that his character exhibits in the book. While talking to the grieving parents, he sounds nasty and disingenuous. Holm's moments of crisis, meant by Egoyan to garner sympathy for this leech, just seem incongruous. The film, then, revolves around the growing antagonism between the needs of the community and the desires of Holm's lawyer. The novel's moral center is more ambiguous.

Finally, though, the failure of *The Sweet Hereafter* is due in part to a failure of the novel. Russell Banks uses a strange voice—he writes as the characters themselves, in the first person, but in a kind of idealized, incredibly nuanced speech. So even the outwardly simpleminded bus driver reveals a profound depth and subtlety of understanding (and a big vocabulary and grasp of current events). All the characters are equalized and ennobled by their articulateness. Banks's intent was probably to get us to empathize with some unlikely folks, but his technique strikes me as a literary cop-out. The points of the novel are often declaimed, not insinuated. The characters' moral outrage and passion is atrophied by their confident, almost clinical description of their emotions and opinions.

Egoyan's soft-pedal portrayal of *The Sweet Hereafter*'s characters was his way of duplicating the sensibility of the novel—but it's a dull sensibility to begin with. Intellectuals like to flatter themselves by saying that art films are those which "challenge" the audience, but *The Sweet Hereafter*, which critics have found irresistible, is Art Film Lite.

Titanic and *Amistad*

James Cameron's luxuriant film didn't challenge my conception of social reality a bit. And a few hours after it was over, I got that familiar acrid taste in my throat, the one that a lot of grandiose epic films induce: after seeing all the romance, glory, and sex, you can't help but feel small and inadequate. But I *loved* the

fucking film. The romance was credible, the glory was acutely ironic, the sex was appealing, and there are many awesome moments: the moonlit, life-jacketed corpses bobbing in the water as a rescue boat glides across the ocean, its passengers calling out for survivors; the great ship's incredible isolation exposed when a flare lights up the night sky and nothing else; the final dream-like shot, which I will not give away. The greatest testimony to *Titanic*'s power? I was moved to tears by Celine Dion's "My Heart Will Go On" as it blared over the closing credits. But then, I thought it was Enya at the time.

Typically, most people I know condescend to *Titanic* (those that have deigned to see it). One of them said it was, "y'know, a good Hollywood movie," and quickly compared it (unfavorably) to *Amistad*. Conventional wisdom has it that *Amistad* is Good For You. Its historical slant—and its determination to give dignity to the oppressed/disempowered—is allegedly redemptive, enriching. But don't folks realize that this is *part of the marketing*? Whatever Spielberg's intentions, this film is being sold as an "educational" flick. Thus my mom, who teaches sociology at a junior college, gets a "course packet" that suggests she take her students to see *Amistad*. It even included a series of lesson plans, one of which proposed that teachers ask their students about their reactions to scenes in the film—*fictionalized* scenes, I might add. *Dances With Wolves*, whose claims to historical authenticity (and artistic credibility) seemed to be invested in long shots of buffalo parading across scenic Wyoming landscapes, did a lot of business that way: my eighth-grade history teacher took us to see it. And as it has done in years past, Hollywood will congratulate itself and justify its indulgences by rewarding this "issue film" with industry congrats and a letterboxed video release (surely the sign of a Film, as opposed to a movie). Critics will happily perform their roles as legitimizers.

This state of affairs is corrupt. On artistic terms, addressing social conflict isn't necessarily the guarantor of genius. On political terms, has there really been an attempt to determine the legacy of these "issue" films? The glib presumption is that more films like "Schindler's List" will make the world a better place. But if Weimar film makers had made 1,000 more social protest pictures, would they have forestalled the rise of Nazism? The suggestion is hilarious, but equally offensive is the assumption—implicit in much of *Amistad*'s reception—that if more mainstream artists address themselves to the "issue" of American slavery, the combined films, TV documentaries, books, billboards, and record albums will do what Bill Clinton's lame apology did not: render the legacy of slavery redundant.

¹ For the facts and more, see Walter Lord's *A Night to Remember*.

² "The Sinking of the Titanic" is on an Austrian import, *The Greatest Songsters* (Document, 1990)—which also has Brown's other four recorded tunes—and Yazoo's new *Times Ain't Like They Used to Be: Early American Rural Music*, Vol. 1.

³ How much of a poseur? If Wilmington smells "art film," or the farts of an auteur, he creams his jeans. He called *Deconstructing Harry* a "masterpiece," too, and gave it four stars.

The Trouble With Tourism

Traveling Around the Incredible Shrinking Planet

by Brian Edwards-Tiekert

In February it just plain sucks to be at Wesleyan. Andrus field, depending on the weather, resembles either a quagmire or an ice-skating rink. The wind is cold enough at night to make breathing painful, and when the sun grudgingly rises over the Connecticut River it has about as much presence as a student nodding off in the back of a lecture hall. It's the time of year when we pause thoughtfully while applying chap-stick, turn to each other, and start asking soul-searching questions:

"Where are you going for spring break?"

If there's one bug that everyone on campus catches this time of year, it's wanderlust. Maybe you're not actually going anywhere over spring break, maybe you can't afford to travel all summer, maybe you're not even doing a semester abroad in an exotic third-world country—but you want to. And, more than that, you want to find out where everyone else is going so you know what you're missing.

MTV culture has given us a pretty good notion of what a standard spring break looks like: sand, surf, sun, sex, and inebriants. Like it or not, snorkeling in Cancun and wet T-shirt contests at Daytona Beach are the first things that come to mind when someone says the words 'Spring Break.' It's part of a larger phenomenon: for years, Club Med commercials and glossy travel brochures have sent us the message that heaven is a place on earth—a pristine expanse of ivory-white sand, breeze-ruffled palm trees, and crystal-clear ocean—and that all you need to return to Eden is a plane ticket, sun block, and a fat wad of cash. It's the one place you can go where your problems won't follow. This Paradise Myth is one of the foundations of the travel business.

For those of us who are unimpressed with the passive self-gratification of the beach resort sun-worshipper, there exists an alternative model: that of the Noble Traveler.

Disenchanted with our material culture, the Noble Traveller stuffs the necessities of survival into an REI backpack, slips some traveler's checks into a money belt, and flies off into the sunset. Poor, dirty, and hungry, the Noble Traveler enjoys meaningful cross-cultural encounters with smiling natives in exotic locales, loses himself in enlightened self-contemplation, and then, his last penny spent, flies back to civilization with a broader mind, a deeper spirituality, and a killer tan.

Those of us sold on this model believe that if

we just look hard enough, we'll find

some tucked-away corner of the world untouched by the dirty hands of globalization, somewhere the people have never seen a Coke bottle or eaten a Big Mac. And when we get there, when we finally find something 'authentic' in the age of corporate culture, it will transform us into better, happier, wiser people.

The Noble Traveler is Marco Polo, he's Sinbad the Sailor, he's Jack Kerouac, he's the Lone Ranger. And he's popular. If you pack a bag and travel around the world this summer, you'll be one of over 500 million people who take international holidays each year. And when that many people go in quest of pristine landscapes and authentic cultures, neither one lasts very long. On the secluded beach where you go looking

for peace and solitude, there's a busload of tourists looking for the same thing. Or, worse yet, some multinational is building a new resort hotel. And the

Like it or not, snorkeling in Cancun and wet T-shirt contests at Daytona Beach are the first things that come to mind when someone says the words 'Spring Break.'

'smiling natives' won't be smiling at you—unless someone's paying them for it.

But hey, that's business. The tourism industry, grossing more than \$3.5 trillion a year, is arguably the world's largest, vying with oil for top status. After World War II, the World Bank earmarked tourism as an ideal means of economic growth for third-world countries, but those countries haven't grown half so much as the industry itself. The number of people travelling abroad per year will have gone from one million at the turn of the century to an estimated 650 million by the end of the millenium.

All the investments made in tourism in the last 50 years have paved the road for the exploitation of developing countries by their wealthier neighbors. Today, multinational corporations are strip-mining third world nations for their 'authentic' indigenous cultures and 'pristine' ecosystems. Hotel chains, airlines, and charter services market smiling natives and ivory beaches to an elite first-world leisure class. In the process, they manage to trample over most of what they're selling.

In the words of Dr. Koson Srisand, former executive secretary of the Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism: "[Tourism] does not benefit the



majority of people. Instead it exploits them, pollutes the environment, destroys the ecosystem, bastardizes the culture, robs people of their traditional values and ways of life and subjugates women and children in the abject slavery of prostitution . . . [It] epitomizes the present unjust world economic order where the few who control wealth and power dictate the terms."



Advertisement for a pool-side beach at a resort in Cancun

"But," the beach resort sun-worshipper protests. "Tourism can prop up struggling economies; foreign money means more jobs; if tourism's an industry, then at least it's a clean one—no smoke stacks, no oil spills—we have a good time, the locals make some money, and everybody goes home happy." Actually, it's just another way for multinational corporations to make a quick buck in the third world. And the business is anything but clean.

US multinationals run resort hotels the same way they run sweatshops. They pay locals a barely livable wage, charge astronomical prices for the product of their labour, and pocket the difference. All that foreign money leaves the country as fast as it came—In some places, as little as 20% of the money 'pouring in' from tourism actually stays in the country. The locals aren't making a buck off the tourists, they're just moving from one form of poverty to another.

Cancun's beaches, for example, are so overrun by foreign-owned hotel chains, restaurants, and charter services that all the signs in the city are printed in English and every price is quoted in US dollars. Mexicans work for peanuts cleaning suites and driving cabs while American tourists lie next to the pool on the beach in front of their \$300-a-night hotels. The corporations running the show are doing what they've always done in places like Mexico: taking advantage of cheap labor and exploiting natural resources—in this case the beaches, the ocean, and the coral reef.

The growth of resort areas like Cancun changes the local economy forever. People move from sustainable livelihoods—i.e. fishing and agriculture—to unstable low-wage service jobs. Sometimes the move is voluntary; other times there's no other option when the

government pushes them off their land to expand a resort. When the people become dependent on tourism, so does the economy, and the fate of a nation rests on its aesthetic appeal to the wealthy elite of first-world countries. The money that these countries invested in tourism for growth leaves them victims of a new form of economic imperialism.

The real irony of the scenic Club Med commercials is that the biggest threat to the pristine expanses of palm-studded beach they advertise is the business they draw. Build a big enough city—even a resort city—on the ocean, and pretty soon you won't want to swim in the water.

Environmental problems plague all aspects of the tourist industry. First world travelers import their wasteful habits into third world countries that can't support them. In places where fresh water is scarce, tourists expect hot showers every day—in Hawaii the average tourist uses six to ten times the amount of water a local does. Our obsession with disposable packaging dogs us wherever we go; tourist money is incentive enough for locals to wrap everything they can in shrink-wrap and cellophane.

In Guatemala, peasant women sell tamales to travelers on busses: they put the tamale in one plastic bag, tie some hot sauce into another, and put the two together into a third. All this in spite of the fact that you don't see any trash cans there—garbage just piles up in the gutters. What does get hauled away doesn't



Meaningful cross-cultural encounters with smilin' natives: Photo from SIT brochure.

get far—they dump it ten feet off the highway on the edge of town. In the smaller villages, people just burn piles of plastic in their back yards.

The worst habit that foreigners import is playing golf. Maintaining a well-manicured eighteen-hole golf course wastes spectacular amounts of water—and



SOCIETY



WORLD ISSUES



every resort worthy of the name needs at least one. Add to that the tons of fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicides that run off into nearby waterways and drinking wells, and you've practically got a Superfund site on your hands.

The Noble Traveler in search of an 'authentic' village of smiling natives might be searching for a very long time. Over the years, pursuing the popular quest for unspoiled cultures has proven to be the surest way of spoiling them.

The first problem is that no matter how light you try to pack, you're still carrying a certain amount of cultural baggage wherever you go. This is why anthropologists tear their hair out trying to analyze their own effect on the cultures they're observing. One anthropologist visiting a good-sized tribe might not have any lasting effects, but how about a hundred tourists? How about a thousand? We don't just interrupt the norms and values of native cultures with our presence—we also bring our own into the equation. And when we bring our money as well, we start enforcing those values.

Bear in mind, too, that if you're traveling in a third-world country, you're a walking advertisement for the unsustainable, consumption-crazed society that happens to be running the planet. Even the happiest of smiling natives can't help but look at our Noble Traveler and think that for the price of that REI backpack he could feed his family for a year.

At the same time, we tend to romanticize the notion of the 'authentic' indigenous culture that we're destroying. So much so that culture becomes a com-

Even the happiest of smiling natives can't help but think that for the price of that REI backpack he could feed his family for a year.

modity. Suddenly, jaded, de-cultured locals are being paid to live up to tourist's ideals of a colorful primitive society. Small villages in Bali perform ritual dances for paying tour groups that they stopped performing for themselves years ago. Mayan craftsmen carve likenesses of gods they haven't believed in since the time of the Spanish missionaries, then sell them to tourists looking for Christmas presents. Some bright entrepreneur sets up a Disneyfied village where the locals, wearing animal-skin loincloths, go about the business of day-to-day life in a primitive bushman village. Tourists, duly impressed, get off the bus, snap some photos, and get back on. When they leave, the bushmen light cigarettes, change clothes, and put on rap music.

We pay locals to bastardize their heritage to live up to our expectations: tourism doesn't just speed up the break-down of cultural traditions; through our romance with the 'authentic,' we make a farce out of whatever remains.

The problem with visions of pure native and smiling natives is that to pursue them is to destroy them: Paradise can't be sold; the Noble Traveller is a joke. As long as we cling to those visions, corporations will be able to monopolize them at the expense of poorer nations. And they'll keep

destroying new peoples and places every year until it stops.

The water at Acapulco is polluted enough, the beach cluttered with enough trash, that it's losing popularity as an international resort. At Cancun, damage done to the coral reef by the hundreds of thousands who explore it every year is swiftly destroying the entire ecosystem. What happens when these two resorts get so trashed that they stop drawing tourists? The Mexican Government finds another pristine stretch of beach, moves the peasants off the land, and invites the multinational hotel chains to start the whole process over again.

The moment a beach loses its pristinity and the resort loses its market, the multinationals simply break ground on another stretch of deserted coast. When an 'authentic' culture's been mainstreamed by the volume of tourists seeking it out, the flow of travellers just shifts its weight to another part of the globe (I hear Thailand and Indonesia are hot right now). We're constantly moving on to trample greener pastures.

There are ways to travel that don't involve pursuing some impossible vision: plenty of organizations offer 'working holidays,' where you spend your vacation doing volunteer conservation or humanitarian work abroad. Better yet, travel as a human rights observer. Right now the Committee de Chiapas is organizing students to record human rights abuses by the military in small villages in Chiapas. Turn your status as tourist to good use: military thugs are much less likely to fire into a crowd of protesting peasants if there's a few Caucasians standing in front of it.

One thing's for sure: don't plan a trip because you're trying to live out an unachievable fantasy. And don't assume that just because you're spending money abroad, you're doing the people there a favor. Next time you're blowing on numb fingers, while someone tell you about their plans for spring break, don't ask *where* you'll be traveling, ask *why*.



Tourism Rocks!!

Leave the Smilin' Natives alone!



SOCIETY



WORLD ISSUES

Calling Tourism evil is like calling Ohio evil. Or coleslaw, or a public drinking fountain. It's there, it will remain there until our civilization crumbles, and no value judgment can be placed on it until then. Meanwhile, why not look at some of the more positive aspects of Tourism? (I use a capital T to denote the industry in general, as opposed to a single, specific act of tourism, like your last trip to Sea World, or what your uncle Jake did in Bangkok last summer.)

Tourism creates jobs. Is this a bad thing? Is the transfer of cash from the hands of rich New York yuppies to the pockets of self-employed lei-makers in Hawaii wrong? NO!! Tourism is the Great Hope for America's (and beyond's) working class today, a new stomping ground for Horatio Alger's ghost. How else can the little guy hope to exploit the big guy but by letting the big guy think he's getting the better end of the deal in paying 40 dollars to the little guy for a 'genuine' scrap of Elvis' BVDs? If you think these kinds of jobs are less stable or sustainable than those in fishing or agriculture, think again: Land may go barren, entire populations of fish may become extinct, but polyester T-shirts and Ray-Bans are forever. No job is more stable than that of a tchotchke stand at a Tourism hotspot, and by extension, a country whose economy is dependent on Tourism is far more stable than one whose existence rests on one or two crops, which could be completely wiped out by a natural disaster. You may just pause now, and notice that no natural disaster has ever thwarted Coca-Cola. God must be a tourist (what do you think He did on the Seventh Day? He parasailed in Acapulco, of course).

Economic and environmental factors aside, the worst argument against the beauty and supremacy of Tourism is that it propagates cultural pollution. Hmmm, "cultural pollution"...now where have we heard that before...? The fact is, even if you could find people wearing Budweiser T-shirts in the remotest regions of the unindustrialized world, Western materialism alone is not going to "corrupt" anyone to the furthest depths of their social psyche—missionary work took care of that a couple centuries ago. It is elitist, disgusting, and unfortunately, almost instinctive, for the Noble Tourist to think the "primitives" swarming about him in the marketplace in Marrakech or Laos are jealous of his Texas and unblemished skin tone. Anyone who's visited a foreign country in the past half century, or for that matter, half millenium, can tell you that the "natives" are anything but jealous of the fat, rich dorks who can't even drink their water. The ubiquity of Euro-American cultural artifacts can be traced to early colonization and conversion, far more powerful tools of cultural corruption than any white guy with a can of Pepsi in one hand and a suitcase of silk neckties in the other.

On the other hand, don't expect Tourism to solve all the world's problems. It may be the solution to eco-

nomie crises in the face of other indus-

by Sarah Wilkes

try losses, but it certainly won't heal government corruption. An overly-altruistic white American tourist can't go into parts of a country where violent protests are going on, expecting to stop the hail of bullets with the appearance of his blonde hair and Eddie Bauer backpack. The dude's gonna get shot down along with the ultimately racist notion that "Soldiers are much less likely to fire into a crowd of protesting peasants if there's a few Caucasians standing in front of it."

Listen: I have seen Tourism at work from the inside, and believe me, once you get over your initial feelings of disgust, you can't help but admire the beauty and ingenuity of the machine. For the past two summers I have worked as a cashier at a zoo's gift shop in a medium-sized American metropolis. Nowhere else have I seen social psychology textbook lessons so beautifully illustrated in real life than there, from behind the cash register. People will pay out the ass for a shoddy \$16 wooden zebra chime, but when their bratty tot asks for a \$4 plush penguin (manufactured in China, of course), forget it. You know why? Because subconsciously (and here I am brushing aside the Soc-Psych book in favor of supporting my argument), they WANT to make a greater contribution to Tourism, the great benefactor of America, all across its social strata! Tourism's job is to make the customer happy, for which in return the customer sheds as much liquid cash as possible, free for an afternoon from the mental chains of American Protestant-ethic tightwadhood. If that means charging a \$100 purchase of completely useless plush animals on an American Express company card, so be it.

So I say: Long live Tourism!! With low-skill labor industries long extinct, and the modern A&E industries slowly dying, where does this leave the lumpen proletariat? Why, behind the taco stand in a Mexican bullfighting arena, that's where! In pool maintenance staff breakroom in an expensive Bermuda resort! Selling Coke (and, in the back room, coke) to fat, ugly Westerners who can't drink the water! Under the trees, in the air, in the basements of government buildings, on the seashore, in the briny deep throughout every livable space, the world sings: "Tourism! O beaaautiful for spaaaaacious skies for amber coins of gold! For industry, for family, for rich, poor, young, and old! Go Wes!! Go, West!!" And God bless (sniff!).

Sarah Wilkes will be spending Spring Break playing golf in Cancun and purchasing "authentic" Mayan art with the dollars she earned selling PVC toy orangutans, which were made in Indonesian and Chinese sweatshops. She hopes to meet some smilin' natives, and convert them to Christianity. Failing that, she'll probably just stay here and ice skate on Andrus field, while Brian does the missionary work for her.



HERMES February, 1998

Idealists Do It Better

Why "Realism" Will Never Change the World

by Justin Tamplin

I am always being told that I am an unrealistic idealist. Apparently, I don't have a realistic view of the world and what can be accomplished. "You're just young. When you get older and out in the real world, then you'll learn to be a realist." Fuck that. Every time someone says that to me, it just makes me more aware of how important it is to stick to my guns and fight for what I believe in. People who say this are either too lazy to commit themselves to making a change or they simply don't know what is really going on in their "real world."

Realist and idealist are not contradictory terms. When you take the time to educate yourself about what makes the "real world" operate and become aware of all its dirty little secrets, your view of reality becomes too clear for you to do anything other than work for change. It's a sad state when people are resigned to simply let the status quo persist, as if it has always been and forever shall be. I know that people really do care somewhere deep down in their hearts. Unfortunately, everyone seems to think that setting the highest standards and not settling for anything less is futile, and in the end only results in frustration and burnout. I contend that idealism is not only absolutely essential for society, but also for the individual.

Any social progress that has ever been made began with a dream that was considered crazy. To quote the computer screen in HASLab, "the people who are crazy enough, who think they can change the world, are the ones who do." Just a few years ago the idea of removing a dam for the sake of restoring fish populations was unthinkable, today several dams have been removed and plans are under way to get rid of some of the more massive ones. Gandhi dreamed of a free India without the use of violence, and eventually achieved it. Abolitionists were considered crazy, but now slavery is unthinkable. On the other side of the political spectrum, the Contract With America shifted the entire political discourse to the right.

Movements that promote the strongest ideals are often termed "radical" or "extreme". These organizations serve a practical purpose in that they make other groups whose stances aren't so strong seem more moderate and accessible to the general public and powers that be. Earth First! and the Animal Liberation Front make groups like the Sierra Club and PETA look more reasonable by comparison. When making their arguments at the bargaining table, the moderates can point to the radicals and say, "Well at

least we're not demanding as much as those people."

Granted, this is playing to the status quo's fear of the idealist and not solving the underlying cause of the problem, but hey, if it works, why not take advantage of it. As progress is made, reality moves closer and closer to what was once seen as an impossible dream, until the former ideal is taken for granted as an everyday truth.

Beyond the purpose of working toward a better society, idealism has its personal benefits as well. Once you have educated yourself and formulated your vision of a perfect world, it is impossible to settle for anything less. Many people stop just before this point.

As progress is made, reality moves closer and closer to what was once seen as an impossible dream, until the former ideal is taken for granted as an everyday truth.

Rather than set lofty goals which may not be reached within a reasonable time, they set lower goals and confine their expectations to what they see as realistic. This view will never lead to great strides in the state of humanity, nor will it result in anything more than a stagnation of yourself and society. If you know what it is you truly wish for, you will never be satisfied until you see your goals reached. Every time you compromise, you will know in the back of your mind that you are betraying your ideals. Living up to your high standards will provide much more satisfaction than the short-lived convenience of ignoring them. Those who set their goals as high as their ideals may have a tougher time reaching them, or may not reach them at all. But in the process of striving for them, they will have the knowledge that they are shooting for something much more than the mediocre. An ideal provides motivation to keep fighting your whole life. Imagine the feeling of succeeding; knowing that you have not compromised is much more satisfying than stopping half way there and settling with what you've got.

Idealism may be frustrating and lonely at times, and you will be tempted to give up, but the end result is infinitely more rewarding for both yourself and the causes you are working for. Stop listening to those who tell you it can't be done. No positive change has ever been made without the force of an idealist behind it, so get off your ass, stop making excuses and go out and change the world!



Dragon-Lord, Environment, and *The HUMAN CONDITION*

A Look at Another Way to Assess Our Relationship to the Environment By Li Yu

One of my favorite books is Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Farthest Shore*, the last part of her Earthsea trilogy. I first read it a year ago, and have returned to it several times since. The series is supposedly for young adults, hardly prime reading material for a junior here like me. Yet I've found each re-reading worthwhile, for every time I do so I find myself captivated by the power of LeGuin's allegory.

The story is quite simple. Ged, the arch-mage of Earthsea and dragon-lord (one who has the power to face dragons as equals), sets out to determine the reason behind the disappearance of magic in the islands, accompanied by a young prince, Arren. After many an adventure, they learn that the loss of magic and other arts is the doing of another mage, Cob. Cob, in seeking to escape death and live on forever, has rent a hole in the shroud that separates the world of the living and the dead. The hole, as Ged and Arren learn, is bleeding the world dry of magic and the arts, and individuals hollow of their identities, as all seek to escape death by avoiding life. Whereupon, Ged and his companion seek out the mage and patch together the chasm.

Sounds familiar, perhaps like something out of Tolkein or a thousand other fantasy books, right? Here you are wrong. The difference lies in the most striking metaphor presented by LeGuin. It is we, the humanity at the present day and age (or perhaps a score years ago) that is represented by the antagonist. We—the beneficiaries of Prometheus—are those who seek to “have the sea grow still and the tides cease just to save one wave, to save ourselves.” In our pursuit of comfort and safety, how often do we ponder upon what we have sacrificed? How much a resemblance, I wonder, do we bear to the evil mage, Cob, who forsook his name and identity to avoid death.

What, you may wonder, does all this have to do with the environment and the human conditions (or anything at all). To see the connection, we should first turn to how we define ourselves as human beings. Our freedom, to create and to change the world, defines us

today (or anytime since the Enlightenment, speaking broadly). To paraphrase Marx, it is our ability to create ourselves in our constant recreating of the environment that distinguishes us from creatures in nature. In this sense, there is no intrinsic value to protecting the environment, as nature is important to us only insofar as we can change it to our ends. According to this vein of thought, all environmental debates should be of the practical nature, i.e. which use of natural resources will generate the most utility for us while incurring the least amount of waste for future generations.

Fair enough, but let's delve into the idea of freedom once more and ask LeGuin's question again (if you are willing to bear with me a moment more). Is our conception of freedom, as the ability to manipulate and transform nature, a product of our valor and judgment? Or is it rather a result of our fear, the fear of death and the uncertainties of life? We are part of nature. But nature is not part of us, as its grand course will remain unchanged, regardless of all our hopes. Therefore, we fear it. To mask this fear, however, we invent the current notion of freedom, setting nature and ourselves in dichotomy, thus forever alienating ourselves from the surroundings. In this scheme, we are only free when we can assert some control over nature.

This definition of freedom is a flawed one, however, for it is based upon both our fear of nature and our hopes of ultimate control over it. These two inter-linked premises make for ill support. Our fear of nature, as we have seen, springs from

the recognition of our inability to control it. We all march down the path toward an inevitable end, after all, despite our dreams of immortality. True freedom lies in our recognition of the fact of our limited nature. It should, therefore, be sought in situating us as part of nature, and conquering our fears of it. Only then can we truly embark upon a path blazed by valor and courage. As for the practical consequence of this conclusion, perhaps it is this: instead of seeing the environment as an object that we can manipulate at our will, let us instead see ourselves in our rightful place as a part of it and make our actions reflect this.

Nature's grand course will remain unchanged, regardless of all our hopes. Thus, we fear it.

To mask this fear, we invent this notion of freedom, setting nature and ourselves in a dichotomy, thus forever alienating ourselves from it. In this scheme, we are only free when we can assert control over nature.





Bill Clinton

Is a Scumbag

Bill Clinton is a *by Aongus Burke* scumbag. Why people on this campus continue to defend this selfish pig of a man is beyond me. I've given up. There was a time when I was really behind Clinton. That was back when he was a candidate running for president. He seemed to be committed to all the issues that I cared about: education, the environment, reducing military spending, child care, job training and real welfare reform. Hell, he was even committed to issues that I never even knew I cared about. Remember health care reform? But since his election, Clinton has fought for nothing that might cost him a few points in the polls. And what he did with Monica Lewinsky is, in my book, almost inexcusable.

Not long after he was elected into office, Clinton began to alienate a lot of the people who helped get him into the White House. He had been president one month when he began the waffling for which he has now become notorious. The initial issue was the gays-in-the-military controversy. Clinton, whose campaign platform promised to end the armed forces' ban on gay men and lesbians, compromised his stand the second a minority of Republicans in Congress began giving him heat. His ultimate "don't ask, don't tell" policy placated no one. But it was early in his presidency, and this struck me as a minor issue at the time.

From day one, Clinton seemed eager to pursue legislation that would win him the favor of congressional Republicans. The North American Free Trade Agreement was no doubt the best example of this. It was a complete anathema to those on the left who thought the Democrats would never betray the inter-

ests of labor. But I was willing to suspend my reservations because I still believed in Clinton. I even professed to my more liberal friends all the arguments for free trade they brainwash you with in Econ 111.

I suppose my real doubts began when Clinton signed the 1994 crime bill into law with the draconian revisions made by Congressional Republicans. The



funding allocations of the bill represented a complete betrayal of the progressive principle that the government should attack social problems like crime at the root, not by building more jails. Still, my rationalization that Clinton was the only force keeping the country from completely tipping over to the right, coupled—as I see in retrospect—with a callous indifference for the well-being of those who might be incarcerated, kept me from losing my faith entirely.

Indeed, the Republican Revolution of November 1994 seemed to justify some of those rationalizations. But it wasn't long before I began wondering whether Clinton had completely sold the left out. I

mean, even if all you can do is hold the line, you at least put up a fight. You get the other side to grant a couple of concessions. But Clinton was all too willing to sign whatever revolting piece of legislation the Republicans put in front of him. Personally, I decided I could never vote for him or Al Gore after they announced their unqualified support for the Defense of Marriage Act. Clinton alienated most of his remaining supporters on the left when he signed a welfare reform bill that Ronald Reagan would have produced an unusually large mass of drool over.

So I can't understand why so many people on this campus have been so quick to defend this prick in the light of these "allegations" that Monica Lewinsky gave him all those blowjobs. It's not like we all don't know that he did it. But most of us seem to be taking a sort of laissez-faire approach. We liberals are a little ashamed that a Democratic president got caught with his pants down, but we try to laugh it off. As a friend of mine said, "as long as he keeps his doing his job, I don't care where he puts his dick."

Perhaps that's fair enough. But even though its not part of the job description, and even though it's hardly the most important function of the office, the president is a moral leader of the nation no matter how you look at it. And Clinton has failed on this one—in a way much bigger than you might initially think.

There are a lot of reasons married people cheat on their spouses. Some situations offer easier grounds for excusal than others. Some infidelity occurs within the context of one-time encounters that might be attributed to the heat of the moment. Longer affairs, especially when men are the cheaters, are often explained with reference to proverbial midlife crisis. Think what you want of these theories or, if you prefer, rationalizations. In any event, it's pretty clear that neither of them can account for what Clinton did.

It would be just about impossible to argue that Clinton was going through a mid-life crisis. He is, after all, the President of the United States—the most powerful man on the planet. And his affair with Lewinsky was not a one-time deal. White House

There was a time when Clinton seemed to be committed to all the issues that I cared about. Hell, he was even committed to issues that I never even knew I cared about. Remember health care reform?

records show that she visited the building over thirty times in the months following the termination of her internship.

Clinton knew exactly what he was doing. It must have occurred to him that what he was doing would be incredibly hurtful to his wife and daughter if they ever found out. Did he really think that, in a setting as closely guarded as the White House, he could be confident that they wouldn't ever find out? But Clinton did it anyway.

Why? My guess is that this comes down to, in one way or another, male entitlement. Clinton feels that, as a man, especially as a successful one, he cannot be expected to restrict the expression of his libido to just a single object—no matter how attractive, intel-

ligent, and worthy his wife might be. This, of course, would seem to be at odds with the Christian beliefs that Clinton has always been so quick to tell us he passionately holds. Word is, though, that back in his Arkansas days Clinton used to say that

Why did he do it? My guess is that it comes down to male entitlement.

according to the Bible a man who has oral sex performed on him by a woman other than his wife isn't committing adultery. Interestingly enough, Clinton has been quoted in the press saying that no "improper" sexual relations occurred between him and Monica Lewinsky, suggesting that the possibility that he thinks certain kinds of sexual relationships between them could be considered acceptable.

Through what contorted exegesis Clinton arrived at his understanding of oral sex I'll never know. To me, it just goes to show how far some people will go to safeguard their own image in the eyes of the Lord (usually the same people who use the Bible to condemn others—something Clinton isn't above). Now I know that marital infidelity isn't itself grounds for impeachment, and that's probably a good thing. But get with it, Wesleyan, and stop caring about what happens to Clinton in this mess. Stop defending this prick who every day continues to show us how little he's committed to the things most of us care deeply about.

It wasn't long before I began wondering whether Clinton had completely sold out the left. Even if all you can do is hold the line, you can at least put up a fight.





Megan's Law Sucks

Why We Shouldn't Be Informed When a Sexual Offender Lives Next Door

by Laura Clawson

So we all got the email informing us about sex offenders registered as living in the area. This much has been covered by the *Argus*, as has the fact that some people support the University's decision to do this, while others of us were deeply upset by it. I happen to be a member of the latter group; while I understand that, in accordance with the Campus Security Act of 1990, they probably had to let us know that there were registered sex offenders in the area, I believe that they should simply have advised us that if we wanted complete information, we could get it.

As upset, angry, and disappointed with the University's decision as I was and am, and as much as I wanted my school to rise above the idiocy of this country, that idiocy must be counted as the main issue here. I recognize the danger and problems inherent in arguing that a probable majority of the people in this country support an idiotic policy. I do so advisedly, however; I have listened to and read most of the arguments in favor of Megan's Law and find them hugely flawed.

First off, let's look at the name: Megan's Law. Megan Kanka was a young child and she was raped and killed; it's a horrible thing and I wish it on no one of any age. And when people are talking or writing about these laws, they inevitably refer, not just to Megan Kanka, but to other cases in which young children were raped and killed. Yet the laws don't just apply to rapist-murderers, or, for that matter, to people who rape Wesleyan students

can kill as many children as you like and not have to register unless you also raped them?) Connecticut has a relatively limited law, although that may not last for long if several state lawmakers have their way.

Currently, Connecticut's law mandates that



Megan Kanka, poster-child for "victims' rights" (photo stolen from CNN web page)

people convicted on or after January 1, 1995 or still on probation or parole for offenses committed earlier register and remain registered for ten years after their probation ends. The offenses requiring registration are all felonies: "first-degree, second degree, or aggravated sexual assault; sexual assault in a spousal or cohabiting relationship; and risk of injury to children by impairing their morals." But there's a move on to increase the law's stringency to require lifetime registration and to include some misdemeanors, including "attempted sexual assault, indecent exposure, and other related crimes." Indecent exposure?

I guess we in Connecticut are lucky—in Rhode Island, people have to register for having committed everyone's favorite "abominable and detestable crime against nature," namely, sodomy.

knife point. They cover a lot of other behaviors, most of them bad, but relatively few of them involving death or children. (And does anyone else find it odd that you

I guess we're lucky—in Rhode Island, people have to register for having committed everyone's favorite "abominable and detestable crime against nature,"



namely, sodomy. Don't laws requiring registration for indecent exposure and sodomy seem like kind of a wide net to be casting for violent offenders?

Another problem is this: Even if I agreed with the premise of Megan's Law and thought that we should all know who around us had committed a sex offense in the past, I would still have to wonder about the people who hadn't been caught. After all, sex crimes are more likely

than most other types of crimes to go unreported. When reported, they present the problems for obtaining convictions that we've all heard about—it is argued that the woman (or, less com-

monly, man) wasn't really raped (sexually assaulted, etc.); she consented and then changed her mind. Or it is argued that she asked for it. In any case, it is probable that a majority of people who commit sex crimes are never convicted, for whatever reason.

If you think you know where all the sex offenders are, might that not make you feel falsely safe from the ones you don't know about? Moreover, one effect of Megan's Law will probably be that people with the money to get good lawyers will plea bargain so that, while they are convicted of non-sex-related offenses, they are not considered sex offenders and therefore never have to register. If this happens, and it seems likely that it will, these laws will disproportionately impact the unwealthy. (As do most laws, of course.) And what about college students? Colleges, after all, have a collective record of protecting their rapists. They get asked to leave for a while, or made to write a letter of apology and do community service. They don't get put in prison or made to register.

While I think the above are important objections to Megan's Law, they aren't my main concern. Here's the big thing for me: the U.S. puts an almost unimaginable amount of energy and money into putting people in jail as punishment for their crimes. I certainly don't think this is effective; the U.S. has a

Does anyone else find it odd that you can kill as many children as you like and not have to register unless you also raped them?

much higher incarceration rate and much longer average sentences than most industrialized western nations, and yet still has more crime.

For instance, in 1990, \$18 billion was spent

on prison construction and operation in the United States. In 1991, most states still suffered from overcrowded prisons. In the early 1980s, fewer Canadians were killed by all means put together than Californians were killed with knives. In 1988, Washington, D.C., with a population of around 600,000, had more drug-related killings than all of Scandinavia, with a population of 18,000,000, had of murders of any type. In

1980, 195 of every 100,000 Americans were in prison; in the early 1980s, Sweden had about a fifth of the U.S. murder rate and had an incarceration rate of only 55 people per 100,000.

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Regardless of what I think and of what logic suggests, a lot of people promote prison as the best way of controlling crime; many of the same people who support the idea that jail is the best way to control crime are also responsible for the existence of Megan's Law. Apparently they see no contradiction here, but let me suggest one. If prison is an effective way of controlling crime, why would people return to committing crimes as soon as they get out? If we don't think prison rehabilitates people enough that we don't have to watch them every minute when they get out, shouldn't we maybe, just maybe, figure out how to rehabili-

tate them?

Megan's Law effectively says that punishment for past crimes should last forever. Once a person has committed a sex crime (and how far behind can laws calling for other sorts of criminals to register be?), they should have no chance to build a good life. They should not be able to live in peace; they should not be able to find a decent job; they should not ever be able to escape their past mistake. Great strategy: I'm sure that stress, misery, and complete denial of dignity will really reduce recidivism rates.



THE LANDLORD WHO WASN'T

Middletown's North End Copes With Neglected Buildings

by **Livia Gershon**

Ferry Street, on the North End of Middletown, disgusts Starla Bolduc for many reasons. Drug dealers knock at her first-floor apartment door at two in the morning offering her drugs. Her baby son is staying with her mother in Maine, and she's afraid to bring him home because of the sporadic violence in the area. And, according to many local residents, city services from police to sanitation serve the area less thoroughly than they do most other parts of the city. More than anything else, though, Bolduc is upset about the state of the apartment building where she lives, 40 Ferry Street.

During the week before Christmas, there was a fire on the third floor of Bolduc's building. The Fire Department put it out, but the water damage reached down to her apartment. The carpets were soaked, the kitchen floor was covered by two inches of water, and no one knew how much electrical damage the

water might have caused. She and her

boyfriend, as

well as the two families above them, had to leave the building. The Red Cross helped the displaced tenants get rooms in the Middletown Motor Inn, where Bolduc and her boyfriend stayed for two days. Then they moved in with a friend who lives across the hall from their apartment. They spent Christmas there.

Bolduc spent the next two weeks trying to reach her landlord, Andrew Vallas, in Meriden. He never returned her calls, and when she spoke to his brother, he told her that Andrew was out of town and hung up. This was no surprise to Bolduc—she hadn't seen or heard from Vallas, or anyone who worked for him, since October. Finally, she convinced the brother to pay for an electrician to check her unit's wiring. She moved back into her home in mid-January only to discover that the apartment now had no hot water. Sick of trying to get results from Vallas, she called a

plumber herself and paid the 50 dollars for him to get the water working properly again.

Meanwhile, on December 23, Nancy Brault, a Middletown Health Department officer, came to check on the building and discovered that the cold water—

but not the hot—was turned off throughout the building. "We're talking about Christmas vacation, kids, Christmas trees," she remembers, "and here are families with no cold water." Eventually Brault convinced the city to get the cold water turned back on, even though,

she says, "there were people here who felt that it

wasn't our responsibility" to hire a plumber.

In fact, legally, Vallas was responsible for both getting the plumbing fixed and securing the fire- and water-damaged apartments. Before performing these services, the Fire and Health Departments had both tried to reach him, but, like

Bolduc,

they never succeeded.

Long before

The was came as no suprise to Bolduc—she hadn't seen or heard from Valas, or anyone who wrked for him, since October.

Vallas disappeared, there were serious problems at 40 Ferry. Divia and Zaida Arteiz, school-age sisters whose family moved in last winter, say that Vallas wouldn't fix anything in their apartment or even pay for materials so that the family could do the jobs themselves. According to Zaida, "The bathroom was all messed up and we fixed some of it, painted it ourselves. We had no alarm when we came here and the inspectors had to put one on." Divia adds that they also had broken windows, roaches, and major leaks. Other tenants reported similar problems, as well as faulty electrical sockets,



Ferry Street, in Middletown's North End.

After the fire, Bolduc spent two weeks trying to reach her landlord, Andrew Valas. He never returned one call.

large water stains, holes in their ceilings, a non-functional laundry room, and broken toilets.

The Health Department became aware of these housing code violations through one of their periodic surveys of the area. At that point, housing code officers could have begun legal proceedings to make Vallas fix the problems, but they didn't. The legal procedure requires the Department to send out a thirty-day notice detailing the problems and asking for a schedule of repairs. After that, if the owner does not correct the problems, the Department must get a court order issued. If the problems are still not solved in thirty more days, the city attorney writes to the owner, leaving another block of time before the city can begin assessing fines for the violations. In general, Brault says, the Department tries to get the violations fixed through informal methods. "If you just send the owner written notice it takes so long that the people who live there are suffering. So most of what we do here is negotiation." "Ninety to 99 percent of the cases," she says, "never have to go to court."

As it turned out, Vallas was part of the one to ten percent of landlords who aren't so compliant. On November 3, after city officials had spent months trying to get 40 Ferry Street's problems solved, Judge Beverly Hodgson issued a court injunction requiring Vallas to make the repairs. On November 22, with the problems still unsolved, and with Vallas failing to appear in court, Hodgson ruled that the city could begin assessing Vallas 99 dollars per day until the repairs were made.

Tim Lynch, the Deputy City Attorney, points out that, theoretically, the Health Department could file criminal charges against Vallas. However, because Middletown doesn't have its own prosecutor for housing code cases, the Department rarely exercises this option, which means that usually the worst thing that can happen to a landlord is to have the property taken away. Lynch points out that in some cases this may not be sufficient motivation for a building owner to improve his or her conduct. "If you're so far in the hole that you can't get your mortgage paid, and you get a letter from me telling you you have to pay a fine, you might just shrug that off." If an landlord is threatened with jail time, he adds, he or she is more likely to pay attention. "Middletown really needs a full-time housing code prosecutor."

Most tenants of 40 Ferry stopped paying rent in

October, when it became apparent that Vallas was not going to send anyone to collect it. Even before that, many of them were questioning whether they had any responsibility to pay. As Zaida Arteiz says, "He wasn't a landlord, exactly, he just came to collect. One time I had to tell him off. I told him, 'you cannot just be coming and collecting. You have to fix the place.' My mom said 'We have a lot of problems in this place—you need to come and fix our stuff.' But he never did."

At least one tenant, however, did keep paying. Starla Bolduc receives a Federal Disability check,

which goes directly to her payee. The payee then sends in her rent money. After Vallas disappeared, Bolduc wanted to stop paying her rent, but the payee continued to send it in. Now it has begun allowing her

to save her money, starting with the January payment. She hopes she will have enough to move to a new building soon.

As of the end of January, Vallas has failed to pay any of his fines or to make contact with the city or his tenants. The next step for the city is for the City Attorney's Office to foreclose on the building. If it does so, the city will then either sell the property with the tenants in it, close it up—evicting all the tenants—and then sell it, or close and demolish it. Many of the tenants express doubts that the city will find any buyers for the property. Sophia Weaver, who has been living

on the second floor for two years, notes that Vallas had been trying to sell the building himself and had no luck. Like most of the tenants, she expects that the city will close the building up and hopes that it will offer them some help in relocating. "We think it's only right that they should place us," she says.

For now, the Health Department is taking care of residents' most

urgent needs, but the building's stairs and hallways are covered with garbage and smell of urine, and most apartments have leaks, malfunctioning electrical systems, broken windows, and other problems. The tenants have received no formal notification of what is likely to happen to their building, but most are looking for new places to live.

Residents of 40 Ferry are not alone in their situa-

On December 23rd Nancy Brault, a Health Department officer, discovered that the cold water—but not the hot—was turned off in the building.



The boarded up house at 44-46 Ferry Street



tion. According to Tim Lynch, there are currently ten Middletown buildings going through court processes, many of them in the North End. In addition, in the past few years the city has taken possession of several buildings which it has closed up and been unable to sell. For example, 44-46 Ferry, a building right next door to 40 Ferry, was taken after the owner failed to provide heat and hot water, as well as basic repairs, for three months, and then failed to pay either the fines or the taxes on the property. The building—which the city considers “blighted” because its dilapidated condition would put inhabitants in danger—is now entirely boarded up. The Common Council has approved a proposal to demolish it. However, the city has provided no funds for the demolition.

Many former residents of 44-46 Ferry are glad the city closed the building down and even happier that the Department of Welfare helped them find new housing across the street at 51-53 Ferry. Yet some people with an interest in the North End, including Carole Ketelsen, who owns two buildings on nearby Dekovan Drive, now argue that 51-53 should be torn down as well. Ketelsen says that one of the main problems with 44-46 was that the landlord didn’t screen his tenants well enough. Now that many of these tenants have moved to the bank-owned building across the street, she says, “the mess has followed them.” She calls 51-53 an eyesore and suggests that it, and similar buildings, should be torn down to make room for better residential buildings and for parking for Main Street businesses, which she thinks would make the area more attractive for shoppers and merchants.

Fifty-one-Fifty-Three Ferry resident Viola Porath argues that the building is “a hundred and fifty percent better” than 44-46. She is glad that she has been able to stay together with friends who had been her neighbors in the old building for several years. T.J. Taylor, another transplant from across the street, agrees that 44-46, as well as 40 Ferry and a few other buildings, should be destroyed. But he worries that the city wants to tear down even the good buildings on Ferry Street, possibly to put in more parking space. “That’s what Middletown is,” he says, “parking lots and banks.”

Whatever city officials would like to do about

Ferry Street, for now it seems that they don’t even have the money to do what all parties agree is the right first step. The city’s apparent inability to either sell or tear down the obviously blighted buildings, which often become centers of drug dealing, is a major concern of the North End Action Team (NEAT). The community organization, which Ketleson and some other landlords, as well as tenants and tenant advocates, are members of, argues that improving the conditions of North End buildings is closely connected with solving the area’s other economic and social problems. NEAT

member Marie Stevens suggests that as long as economic opportunities for local residents remain as limited as they are now, drug-sales-related property damage and the inability of some tenants to pay their rent on time will create problems for both landlords and tenants. “On one hand,” she says, “houses aren’t to



Stella Boduc at home

blame—a lot of landlords lost a lot because the apartments were destroyed, to be fair about it. And a lot of tenants lost out because they were still there, and they suffered.” She advocates attempts to improve job opportunities, especially for the young. “The thing is, you don’t want to move problems, you want to solve problems. When you’re

moving these kids around, there’s still the same situation. No place to go—no place nice. Talk to the

Residents of 40 Ferry are not alone in their situation. According to Tim Lynch, Deputy City Attorney, there are currently ten Middletown buildings going through court processes, many of them in the North End.

kids around here. They have no cars. They need job training, and when [reformers] say they want jobs for the community—how, if they don’t have the training for it?”

More immediately, however, some NEAT members argue that the city should allocate more money to fix or demolish blighted buildings and that it should keep tenants of buildings like 40 Ferry better informed of the legal situation of their homes. NEAT members hope that in the future the process of relocating residents of buildings that the city plans to close can operate more smoothly. That would mean that tenants wouldn’t need to be as anxious about their immediate future as Starla Bolduc and the other residents of 40 Ferry are now.



Center for the Humanities

The Center for the Humanities holds probably the most regular lecture series on campus, with lectures by faculty fellows, who teach only one class during their semester at the Center, but attend all the lectures and colloquia as well as presenting their own work; research fellows, who come from other institutions for the semester; visiting lecturers; and the Mellon fellow, who stays at the Center for the whole year, teaching one course during that time. There are also three or four student fellows a semester, all seniors doing work related to the semester's theme. Juniors should already have gotten a mailing about this; if your work is even sort of applicable, I encourage you to apply. It's not only educational, it's actually kind of fun.

Each semester the series has a theme, such as Culture and the Market, Producing the Past, Cultural History and Cultural Studies, and, this semester, Culture and Visual Representation. Although the Center's cultural studies focus does mean that very few scientists speak, it is otherwise resolutely interdisciplinary. Last semester, for instance, speakers came from English, history, anthropology, philosophy, american studies, and science, technology & society departments.

While I haven't become an expert on the subject of any of the lectures I've been to, I have gotten a sense of the ways that people from different disciplines might approach the same topic and of the incredible range of subjects that can be productively studied. This has informed just about every class I've taken at Wesleyan (though I'll admit that this might be less true if I were a physics major). The Center for the Humanities has therefore been an incredibly important part of my education; perhaps it could be the same for you. (Now isn't that a tantalizing notion?)

—Laura Clawson

Note: All lectures are on Mondays at 8 PM in the Russell House. they are followed by colloquia (discussion sessions with speaker and others) at the Center for the Humanities (Pearl Street) at 10:30 AM on Tuesday.

February 23	On Retrospectatorship	Patricia White (English, Swarthmore College)
March 2	Horror and Humor	Noel Carroll (Philosophy, University of Madison, Wisconsin)
March 23	Teapots and Airpumps: Science, Sentiment and Ideology in Copley, Wright of Derby and Hannah Foster	Bryan Wolf (American Studies, Yale University)
March 30	Purchasing Persona: Consumption, Representation, and Identity	Jonathan Schroeder (Marketing, University of Rhode Island)
April 6	The Ontology of the Digital Image	Johanna Drucker (Art History, Yale University)
April 13	Lady Macbeth in the White House: the Making of an Icon	Gay Smith (Theater, Wesleyan)
April 20	"Judicious Oeillades": Domestic Surveillance in <i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	Natasha Korda (English, Wesleyan)
April 27	Must Justitia be Blindfolded? The Challenges of Images to the Law	Martin Jay (History, University of California, Berkeley)
May 4	Television Machines; Icons and Rituals of the TV Production Culture	John Thornton Caldwell (Communication, UCSD)

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